

MARKETING GUIDE

Messaging That's Memorable

Your Minute Message Model™

INTRODUCTION

“So, what does your organization do?” If these words strike fear in your heart, you’re not alone.

We frequently hear from our nonprofit clients that they *know* why their organization matters, but don’t always know how to sum it up succinctly.

They report wasting time delving into program details as they grasp for something to say, but not really knowing if they’re making a real connection with their reader or listener. This lack of brevity and focus makes it hard to hold their audiences’ attention, much less engage them passionately in the work.

In our noisy, sound-bite culture you need a way to quickly and memorably state your case. Our Minute Message Model is designed to do just that. Using this model for creating powerful messages, you’ll confidently represent the organization you love, helping you attract more support from more people.

It's called the Minute Message Model to help you remember two important points:

- Make it brief.
 - Say the most important things first.

Whether you've got one minute to get your message across during a shared elevator ride, five minutes at a reception, or ten minutes while your next major donor reads your case for support, our Minute Message Model will give you confidence that you're using whatever time you have well.

Message Basics

Use Your Full Name

Your name typically conveys a great deal of information about your organization in a way that an acronym just doesn't.

Never Assume

Your audiences don't know nearly as much about your organization as you hope they do. What's the problem you're addressing, and why should they care? Start there every time.

Repeat, *Ad Nauseam*

It's a fact: you will be sick to death of repeating your message before it begins to sink in with your key audiences. We're bombarded with thousands of messages each day, so it takes repetition to break through.

Add Benefits, Subtract Features

Features are what your organization does. Benefits are what happens as a result. People do not donate to features; they donate to get results.

Your Minute Messages

1. The Belief Message

Define yourself and what you believe.

If you've only got a quick minute to describe your organization, you need to make sure you're only covering the most important things. Don't waste time on the details. Instead, speak in clear, simple, broad terms about the big, exciting ideas and belief behind your organization. Often referred to as an "elevator pitch," your Belief Message should differentiate you and make it easy to understand the basics without going into too much detail. And a good Belief Message will suggest the problem you're trying to solve.

Exercise: The Belief

A compelling Belief Message provides an introduction to your organization, its brand, and the work you do. This simple exercise allows you to create a Mad Libs-style Belief Message that will leave your audience interested, informed, and asking for more.

_____ believes _____
Name of Organization Value
Every day we _____ for _____.
Verb Object Constituents
because _____.

Example: Belief Message

At Healthier Kids Foundation, we believe preventative care at an early age makes things fair for everyone. Every day, we work side-by-side with families to identify and eliminate kids' health issues before they even begin. Because without us, barriers that could be corrected may stand in the way of kids joyfully climbing the ladder of life.

2. The Problem Message

Now that your audience is intrigued and knows the basics about you, you have time to go a little deeper. Here's your chance to elaborate. What problem does your organization exist to solve? What aspect of the problem is it that *only* your organization is addressing?

You'll only have one Belief Message, but you can create several Problem Messages. Each one highlights a problem, and reinforces that your work solves it. Think your problem is so obvious you don't need to say it? Think again. Skipping the Problem Message means you miss the chance to set your organization up as the expert in solving it. Powerful Problem Messages are visionary and help you build an emotional connection with your audience so they want to help you solve those problems. Craft your Problem Messages by answering the question, "What's the problem out there that only my organization can solve?"

Examples: Problem Message

Curious Theatre: Big theatres have to produce shows that are guaranteed to fill seats. There will always be a need for entertainment but somebody has to be producing the art that makes us think harder, feel more, and propels our society forward. Denver needs an independent theatre that can choose topics and stories that don't just fill seats, but fill minds with new ideas, hearts with passion and lives with meaning.

Energy Outreach Colorado: Every day, unexpected circumstances arise for people in Colorado just like you and me. Life doesn't ask permission when it brings on a setback, and more often than not, one missed payment leads to another. When times get tough, our neighbors deserve an ally that alleviates their home energy struggles so they can stop worrying and get back to living.

3. The Impact Message

Time is ticking, but if you have a provocative Belief Message and an emotional Problem Message, chances are your audience will want to hear more. So now's your chance to prove that your organization gets results in solving the problem. This is best done with a story rather than facts, figures, pie charts, or statistics.

Tell a story, share an anecdote, or invite your audience to imagine a "what if" scenario. Make it juicy and vivid so the story sticks with them. Don't explain what programs you offer. Instead, demonstrate the importance of those programs by showing what happens when they work.

A great story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It has a single protagonist and something unexpected. Most importantly, end your story by describing how *only* your organization could have created this outcome.

Example: Impact Message

Brian had been living on the streets for three months. He was hungry and tired of the hard life had dealt him. He had been to numerous shelters around town and received a meal and a bed, but a day later he was right back where he started. When he came to Town Services, Sarah met him at the door. They talked about his current state and where he hoped to be. She helped him find food and shelter for the night, and the next morning helped him enroll in a class that could help him put food on the table for himself. And yet two days later Brian failed to show up. Sarah noticed, but also knew that any number of challenging factors—from mental illness to drug addiction—could be at play.

Brian showed up again several days later, but the pattern continued: in for a few days then out again. Finally, Sarah confronted Brian directly: did he really want to make the changes in his life that would help him move off the streets? Was he ready to commit?

That's when Sarah learned something she hadn't expected. Brian's frequent disappearances were the result of sharing care for a pet dog. Most shelters won't accept animals. Brian and his friend Julio would each take turns living on the street so that their dog Sunshine would be well cared for.

When Sarah better understood Brian's needs, she knew what she had to do. She picked up the phone, and today Town Services proudly partners with Home for Fido to ensure that people experiencing homelessness—and their pets—can find a better life. Brian now works full time there caring for the animals.

4. The Detail Message

The Detail Message leads up to the “Ask.” Tailor this message to your particular audience; you’ll be in a stronger position, when the time comes, to make them the heroes of the story: “This happens because of you.”

The Detail Message also links features with benefits. It’s not enough to talk about what you’re doing. You have to demonstrate why what you’re doing is important. For example: “Our computer literacy workshop gives our low-income clients the skills they need to create a resume and look for a job, and also to become more self-sufficient and relevant in a technology-charged world.” That’s much more compelling than, “We offer computer literacy workshops to low-income clients.”

Example: Energy Outreach Colorado

Program: Single Family Weatherization Program

Program Description (with benefit): When people living in inefficient homes are connected to weatherization programs that make their homes more efficient, they can better afford their home energy bills, allowing them to allocate more of their budget to life's needs.

Summary

First, introduce your organization (your Belief Message). Then, name a problem that you solve (a Problem Message). Next, add a story (an Impact Message) that shows your audience how it plays out in real life.

Then (and only then) you can get to your programmatic specifics using a Detail Message, explaining in detail how your programs support getting the job done. If your audience wants to hear them, your Detail Messages describe the nuts and bolts of how you achieve impact and put your values into action.

End each Detail Message by asking for what you need. If you’re speaking to donors, ask for money. Be concrete: how much, from how many, to accomplish exactly what? If you need volunteers, ask your audience to sign on. If you’re looking to cement a strategic partnership with a peer agency, ask them to join you in your work.

Use this moment. **Ask.**

Conclusion

No one knows your organization as well as you do.

Even your most ardent supporters can quickly get lost in a stream of data and programmatic jargon. The thing that they care most about is that you’re achieving your mission, solving problems, and making a difference. They care less about how you do it. Every conversation, every newsletter, every annual report, video, tweet and news interview is a new chance to use your time well by reinforcing *why* your organization matters and why people should get involved. **Use your time well.**

Learn More

Mission Minded is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofit organizations.

We believe that a brand that sets you apart is essential to a nonprofit’s success. Every day we guide nonprofits to uncover the big, bold idea that will attract more people to their work. Because in today’s world, a worthy mission is not enough. You’ve got to communicate what makes you unique at every opportunity.

Our clients successfully raise more money and attract the support they need to achieve their goals. To find out how Mission Minded can help your organization, call us today at 415-990-9360.